

4-1975

# The Experimental-Gestalt Growth Group

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1975

THE EXPERIENTIAL-GESTALT GROWTH GROUP

A Thesis

Presented to

the Faculty of the Department of Psychology

Western Kentucky University

Bowling Green, Kentucky

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Daniel J. Miller

April 1975



THE EXPERIENTIAL-GESTALT GROWTH GROUP

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## THE EXPERIENTIAL-GESTALT GROWTH GROUP

Daniel J. Miller

April 1975

39 pages

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Volunteer college students participated either as members of two experimental experiential-Gestalt growth groups or as members of a control group. The experimental groups met for one two hour period per week for eight weeks. It was hypothesized that the experimental group members would change significantly in the direction of increased self-actualization as measured by the Personal Orientation Inventory (POI) while the nontreatment control group members would not. A comparison of pre- and posttest scores for the groups indicated no significant effects of the group process. Increases occurred over the nine week period for both experimental and control subjects. The importance of proper control groups is stressed. Implications for further research indicate a need to identify factors which cause control group members to change in the direction of increased self-actualization without participation in an intensive group process.



## Introduction

In the earliest recorded history, there are accounts of man attempting to understand his behavior, his thoughts, and his feelings. Most of these early attempts at self-understanding included spiritual concepts; good "spirits" were the determinants of good behavior, thoughts, and feelings, while bad "spirits" caused bad behavior, thoughts, and feelings. Decisions about whether one's spirits were good or evil were made primarily by significant people in the person's environment.

In 560 B.C. Hippocrates developed a more scientific understanding of humans, proposing that human behavior, thoughts, and feelings are determined by one's medical condition. This theory, while supposedly more advanced scientifically, appeared to lessen one's responsibility for his behavior; one must be tolerated and his behavior must be understood in terms of his physiological makeup. It seems now that this attempt at understanding and explaining man was probably ahead of its time, for although it appeared again hundreds of years later and is a force we are still dealing with today, it was not given much popular attention and was lost soon after Hippocrates' death with the beginning of the Dark Ages.

During the Dark Ages human behavior was again seen as being determined by good or evil spirits residing in or

influencing an individual. However, a new phenomenon concerning human behavior and relationships began occurring during this time as well. Organized religious groups began to appear and, while their basis for understanding human behavior still arose from effects attributed to good or evil spirits, there were some new and unique aspects of their small group meetings which were the beginnings of a new emphasis on human interactions. In these groups members were interested not only in mutual mysticism but in understanding and supporting one another. The strength of the early religions derived as much from this tolerance of and caring for one another as it did from any commonality of religious beliefs. During the next several centuries, including the first two recorded centuries of our own country, these small religious group meetings were the primary form of structured interpersonal interactions and attempts at understanding human behavior. John Wesley (1850), one of the most influential early American religious leaders, said of his own religious groups:

I desired a small number to spend an hour with me every Monday morning. My design was not only to . . . incite them to love one another more, and to watch more carefully over each other, but also to have a select company, to whom I might unbosom myself on all occasions, without reserve.  
(p. 31)

One of the rules of Wesley's groups was: "To desire some person among us to speak his own state first, and then to ask the rest, in order, as many and as searching questions as may be, concerning their state, sins and tempta-



tions" (Wesley, 1850, p. 33). Members were encouraged to speak everything that was in their hearts without exception, without "disguise and without reserve" (Wesley, 1850, p. 33). Emphasis in these religious groups focused on here and now experiencing. "Let your expressions be clear and definite, pointed and brief, having reference to your present experience, so that the state of your mind may be easily apprehended" (Newstead, 1843, p. 33). Honest and complete confession was the goal of these groups:

If we yield to the suggestions that our distresses are the most deplorable, that our sins are so heinous that they ought not to be disclosed, or are so trivial that they need not be confessed, . . . or that we should give an unfair and partial account of our true state, . . . and refer in but an obscure manner to whatever in us is disagreeable and unfavorable, . . . our testimony in all these cases amounts to nothing more than a hurtful illusion. (Rosser, 1855, p. 35)

Physical expressions of oneness and agreement were encouraged; "Brother, is thy heart with mine, as my heart is with thine? If it be, give me thy hand" (Wesley, 1850, p. 36). Reports of these early groups are filled with the testimonials of people who have undergone changes, frequently sudden and radical experiences. Typically, after having first experienced the feeling of being crushed by guilt, despair, and helplessness, they then were able within this supportive group, to experience a turning point in which they would feel accepted, understood, and loved, whereupon a flooding of gratitude and of freedom would allow them to reshape certain behaviors and enjoy new feelings.

Unfortunately, the last two hundred years in our coun-



try has brought about a change in religion and its meaning to its followers. Religious groups have grown to tremendous sizes, often with a single group now holding the membership of a thousand or more individuals. The politics of church demoninations encourage this growth, however, these large groups make the goals of the earlier small groups impossible to attain. No longer can there be the intimate acquaintance, sharing and support of the small groups.

Other trends in our country's development as well have contributed to the lack of communion we are now experiencing. The individual and the rights of the individual are extolled in our legal system and in our everyday life. The intimacy and support offered by one's family are becoming a rarity as the nuclear as well as the extended family system seems to be breaking down. Industrialization and urbanization have contributed also to the growing autonomy of the American individual. We are all small parts of big government, companies, and cities, too large and too complex to allow much individual input or to lend much feeling of support (Toffler, 1970). Losing emotional contact with people, we have focused on material and technological gains. Positions and possessions portray our worth and the picture of who we are; our feeling and thought about ourselves as well as about others are unimportant and it must be considered a waste of time and effort to attempt to explore them. We are a society which deals with tangibles, not intangibles.

Never before has man come so close to the fulfillment

of his material dreams as has our country today. Until very recently, this American world looked very good, the best kind of world anyone could imagine. However, recent political and economic events in our country have shaken our image about the desirability of the world we have created. We have been forced to focus on another area of development and perfection, perhaps assumed but long neglected in our country, that is, the perfection of man. Have we come closer to the realization of this dream of all mankind, the perfection of ourselves as human beings? A world of man loving his neighbors, sharing their burdens, doing justice, speaking truth, and becoming all that he potentially can be? Erich Fromm (1950) felt that raising such a question is embarrassing since the answer is so painfully clear. He stated:

While we have created wonderful things we have failed to make of ourselves beings for whom this tremendous effort would seem worthwhile. Ours is not a life of brotherliness, happiness, contentment, but of spiritual chaos and bewilderment dangerously close to a state of madness -- not the hysterical kind of madness which existed in the Middle Ages but a madness akin to schizophrenia in which the contact with inner reality is lost and thought is split from affect. (p. 2)

One may expect the area of psychology to have dealt with the perfection of man. Has not psychology even by definition been concerned with discovering the conditions for human understanding and happiness? Early philosophy, out of which psychology developed, stated that happiness could be achieved only when man had achieved inner freedom, and only then could he be mentally healthy. The word



psychology itself derives from the Greek words meaning study of the soul. The first psychologists were considered to be "physicians of the soul" and directed themselves to man's emotions, reason, ethics, values, and thus his state of inner freedom. However, considering the major development of psychology to have taken place in the last 75 years, we must recognize that it did not occur autonomously but was influenced greatly by the concurrent development of our society. Affected by the new material prosperity and success in mastering nature, psychology began to question whether the ethics, values, etc. of man need be the primary concern of the discipline and of theoretical inquiry. Emphasis was focused away from emotions to the intellect, which could be used as an instrument to manipulate things and people. Psychology, in order to establish itself as a discipline, became more academic and rigid, attempting to imitate the natural sciences and laboratory methods of weighing and counting, dealing now with seemingly everything except the "soul." It tried to understand those aspects of man which could be measured objectively and claimed that ethics, values, knowledge of good and evil, and man's inner freedom and happiness were metaphysical or intangible concepts and outside the realm of the science of psychology. Thus affected by our American cultural development, psychology became a science but with the notable absence of its single original subject matter, the soul of man. As such, psychology could not be expected to deal with the non-sharing,



non-understanding, lonely, isolated individuals apparently created by our society. In addition, psychology's roots in the science of Hippocrates and the present field of medicine have helped to create the idea that whatever we are has been caused by our physiological makeup. We are led to believe that we are helpless victims who are not responsible for our behavior and cannot motivate ourselves to change.

Many personal and interpersonal problems of our present society are therefore evident. The close contact and intimacy of the small religious groups has for the most part been lost because of increasing group size. Religion is now primarily social contact in which good appearances are emphasized. Our society centers on the marketplace; knowledge about and manipulation of other people makes one appear successful and more worthwhile. This manipulation requires thinking or intellect, not feeling, and in order to manipulate well one must portray a particular image of himself whether it happens to be an image of being strong, flawless, weak, responsible, irresponsible, disappointed, or whatever. Real feelings are concealed and camouflaged behind the chosen behavior of an individual which best aids his manipulation. People develop a narrow role or image of themselves and become closed, unchanging, and distrustful of others. The impersonalization of our mechanical society encourages autonomous functioning and we develop individual maladaptive coping techniques instead of sharing and supporting each other in the similarity of our condition.

The discipline of psychology, presumably the one area where real feelings and emotions would be emphasized, has tended to instead also focus on the objective, scientific parts of man. Nowhere, it seems, is there a directed concern about man loving his neighbors, sharing their burdens, doing justice, speaking truth, and becoming all that he potentially can be. How might people become more like this and thereby more like what Maslow (1962) has called "self-actualizing"? Actualizing people are not the rigid, unchanging, distrustful individuals so common in our society. Rather, the actualizer is able honestly to experience his feelings, whatever they may be. He is characterized by genuineness, awareness, and aliveness and is fully aware of nature, art, music, and the other real dimensions of living. The actualizer is spontaneous, having the freedom to be and express his potentials. He is master of his life and not a puppet or object. The actualizer has a deep trust in himself and others and the confidence that he and others can cope with life straightforwardly and realistically (Shostrom, 1972).

Given these goals and characteristics of self-actualization, which would seem to counteract the isolation of man from himself and others, how might they be implemented for people today? It is the hypothesis of this present study that we can encourage these goals by focusing on the humanness of man -- each individual's uniqueness -- but, in addition, the commonalities of feelings such as weaknesses,



joys, fears, anxieties, and hopes. It is suggested that information about feelings can be gotten from one's own physical manifestations of his emotions and from personal interactions with other people. Increased self-awareness and the discovery of mutual support and understanding will result from guided interactions and will lead to increased capacity for love of and concern about oneself and others as well. This process will, in addition, allow individuals to develop and utilize their unique capabilities, or potentialities, and to experience more fully joy and sorrow, strength and weakness, fear and confidence, and love and anger (Shostrom, 1972).

Several methods may be offered as means for facilitation of these stated processes and goals. One may suggest a radical change in our whole society with a return to simple, interdependent kinds of living. A return to early forms of religion, increased and improved education, psychotherapy, or changes in mass media may also be suggested. Given the conditions and values of our present society, however, it is hypothesized that one practical method would be the formation of small group meetings of eight to ten individuals. These groups, while having many of the same goals as the early religious groups such as honesty, openness, focus on here and now experiencing, and willingness to take risks, would have no explicit religious basis in light of the current disfavor of religion by many individuals of today. Similarly, these groups would not claim



to be therapy groups because of popular ideas about therapy, one of which being that it is something done to persons rather than something that they themselves take responsibility for. The groups would be referred to as growth groups, with stated goals of showing people how to discover their own potential through increased self-awareness, experience new methods of interaction with others, accept their own responsibility for their lives, and be able to feel and live more fully and honestly. It is therefore hypothesized that a group of normal college students who participate in such a growth group will change significantly in the direction of increased self-actualization, as measured by the Personal Orientation Inventory (Shostrom, 1966), while a control group will not demonstrate a comparable change.

## REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The efficacy of using small groups as a means for change in our country is beginning to be realized. The first well-known process groups were organized in 1946 under the direction of Kurt Lewin (Leiberman, Yalom, & Miles, 1973). Based on Lewin's theoretical formulations, National Training Laboratories (NTL) was founded in 1950, and a powerful method of human relations training was developed. Early T-groups (training groups) emphasized the group process, an individual's behavior relative to this group and the improvement of his human relations skills. Accordingly, these groups became very popular among progressive business organizations and school systems. As T-groups became better known, many clinicians studied their techniques and adapted them to group therapy. Thus, groups continued to be used for selected members of large organizations with particular goals and in a limited variety of clinical settings. It has only been recently that the potential of using groups with individuals on all levels of functioning has been realized.

As indicated earlier, impetus for the more modern encounter groups of today has been derived from many sources. The need and desire for such groups cannot be tied to any single source but was likely more a result of many patterns in our present society. During the period of the 1960's



many of the institutions which traditionally had provided stability and intimacy were showing signs of breaking down. The family, the stable neighborhood or work group, the local grocer, and the neighborhood church all seemed to have fallen prey to the demands of progress and technology, thereby diminishing support and increasing isolation and autonomy of individuals. Today, even the support of knowing we have a stable democratic government is in serious question. It is not surprising that in this state of affairs people are looking for ways of developing their own resources and drawing on the support of others. The encounter group has become for many a place where one can drop the facade of competence demanded by a fast moving, competitive society, and expose his doubts, fears, anxieties, and disappointments.

Carl Rogers (1970), famous for his client-centered individual psychotherapy, has in recent years switched to groups as his primary focus, having ". . . experienced the potency of the changes in attitudes and behavior which could be achieved in a group" (p. v). He felt that the main impetus for the quick spread of groups and the enormous demand for more is ". . . the increasing dehumanization of our culture, where the person does not count -- only his IBM card or Social Security number. This impersonal quality runs through all the institutions in our land" (p. 10). Rogers commented further on the psychological need that draws people into encounter groups:

I believe it is a hunger for something the person does not find in his work environment, in his church, certainly not in his school or college, and sadly enough, not even in modern family life. It is a hunger for relationships which are close and real; in which feelings and emotions can be spontaneously expressed without first being carefully censored or bottled up; where deep experiences -- disappointments and joys -- can be shared; where new ways of behaving can be risked and tried out; where in a word, he approaches the state where all is known and all accepted, and thus further growth becomes possible. This seems to be the overpowering hunger which he hopes to satisfy through his experiences in an encounter group. (p. 10)

Rogers felt that there are many specific areas of modern life in which the intensive group experience seems to have possibilities for constructive use. Among these are industry, government, race relations, international tensions, families, closing the generation gap, and educational institutions.

G. R. Bach (1954), in Intensive Group Psychotherapy, said participation in groups is a unique experience in our culture both for group members and for the therapist. He stated that in no other social group situation is it safe and practical to formulate to the self and to share with others emotional experiences of a very personal nature. No other setting affords the opportunity to observe the self in interpersonal contact, to discover one's pattern of personality in social action, and to check private observations about oneself against the impressions of others.

H. Goldenberg (1973) stated that of several factors accounting for current public enthusiasm for groups, the most significant is ". . . in a period of rapid national social



change, the confusion, loneliness, sense of alienation, and dehumanization which lead people to turn to others for support, understanding, and acceptance" (p. 194). Thus, he feels that the increase of groups is inevitable, having developed spontaneously in response to the needs of many people.

Many different names have been given to the groups existing today. Despite their varied form and techniques, however, they all seem to share some common features. In general they are small enough to encourage much face-to-face interaction; an attempt is made to provide an intensive, high contact group experience; they focus on the here and now behavior and feelings of group members; they encourage openness, honesty, interpersonal confrontation, self-disclosure, and strong emotional expression. Participants are normally not referred to as "patients" and the experience is usually not labeled "therapy." Specific goals vary from group to group though most attempt to increase self and social awareness which may then lead to a change in behavior (Leiberman, Yalom, & Miles, 1973).

Gestalt groups emphasize positive directions and goals of living, and use techniques directly and immediately designed to produce them. The task of the group facilitator is to help the individual overcome the barriers that block awareness, and to let nature take its course (that is, awareness develop) so he can function with all his abilities (Fagan, 1970). The basic endeavor then is to assist the individual to become aware of how he is now functioning

as an organism and as a person (Perls, 1951). The individual's increased awareness of his avoidance and his relief as he becomes able to expand his experiences and behavior are seen and felt immediately as he increases his capacity for living.

A. H. Maslow's research led him to look at people who had apparently already reached goals such as Gestalt therapy seeks to promote. His personal emphasis on the positive aspects of personality prompted him to focus on the functioning of self-actualizing people, rather than on those displaying pathological behavior. In the research on healthily functioning people, Maslow found that they were able to express "righteous indignation" or anger, yet at the same time were able to express tenderness and love. He found them very competent and strong, yet they had an acute awareness of their own personal weaknesses (Maslow, 1962). This basic characteristic of healthy people has been amplified by and forms the groundwork for Shostrom (1972) in his theory of self-actualization. Using this formulation, he emphasized that the only way in which these polarities of characteristics can be meaningful is within the context of relationships with other people.

Shostrom felt that in the life of the average person, rigidification takes place. Our natural rhythmic expression of these polarities is affected by parents and teachers who take control of our lives and say "yes" to some of our responses and "no" to others. They teach us to see through



their own personal fears. For an average child, life becomes simplistically good or bad, right or wrong, acceptable or unacceptable. Adults and even siblings are given the right to judge our worth, to determine our merit, and to manipulate our love. Having established rigidity through relationships our personalities can, through interactions with others, once again begin to experience the flow of the polarities. Thus, according to Shostrom, these interactions contain the value of small groups. In these groups, however, he stressed that the people must learn not to become dependent or independent, but rather interdependent. This concept of inner-directedness yet sensitivity to others, as well as the polarities of feelings of a self-actualizing person, is vividly reflected on the Personality Orientation Inventory (POI), devised by Shostrom as a measure of self-actualization (Shostrom, 1966). When the actualizing person can feel separate and autonomous yet can let himself move rhythmically between love and anger, strength and weakness in his interpersonal relationships, he can avoid control and rigidification. Group methods for encouraging such responses in people in the group setting are of the experiential-Gestalt orientation, and can be drawn from those suggested by Stevens (1971), Shutz (1967), and Shostrom (1972).

Numerous group studies testing whether or not such "growth groups" do in fact increase participants' self-actualizing tendencies have been conducted in the last few years. One such study had as participants 20 normal college

students, freshmen to seniors, 18 to 22 years old. This group met for nine weekly sessions of four hours each and had an experiential-Gestalt orientation. Exploration and expression of here and now were fostered and psychological "archeology" was discouraged. Members were urged to be transparently real, trust their feelings, and become more aware of their personal freedom and the responsibility associated with this. Results of this study indicated significant changes in the positive direction on 8 of the 12 scales on the POI. Controls showed no significant changes (Foulds, 1970). It must be noted, however, that the controls, while matched for sex and pretest scores on the POI, were not volunteers for the group.

In a similar study, Foulds (1971) again investigated the hypothesis that an experimental group of college students who participated in a growth group would change significantly in the direction of self-actualization as measured by the POI while a nontreatment control group would not. Group composition and procedures were the same as for the previously discussed study (Foulds, 1970). Results revealed that all 12 mean scores of the experimental group changed in a positive direction on the POI following the growth group experience. Statistically significant changes occurred on eight scales, while changes in all the control group mean scores were nonsignificant (Foulds, 1971). Evidence from these two studies suggest that a group experience which focuses on expanded awareness, authenticity, and more effective interpersonal communication may be a useful method of



fostering increased self-actualization and the personal growth of participants.

In both of the studies by Foulds, control subjects were matched for sex and pretest scores on the POI but were not volunteers for the group process. Implications of this fact, while difficult to assess, may be suggested. Volunteers who then do not participate in a group may be motivated to seek out other possible methods for increasing their own self-actualization while non-volunteers may in fact be more satisfied, rigid, and less likely to change significantly over time. People actively seeking change may find it in ways other than an intensive group experience.

A recent study by Sheridan & Shock (1970) explored the issue of growth group volunteers, although it did not really clarify the problem of non-volunteer control groups. Eighty-one undergraduates volunteered for seven weekly sessions of a growth group. Although no group was actually conducted, it was found that the volunteers scored higher on all but one of the scales on the POI than did the non-volunteers. On all scales but the Nature of Man, volunteers tended to more closely approach the profile suggested by Shostrom (1966) as being representative of the self-actualizing individual, than did the non-volunteers. This seems to suggest that an individual who is motivated for change may already possess some degree of self-actualizing characteristics, such as being flexible and less dependent on his environment. Given more research support, this finding may

have important implications concerning the applicability of groups.

Varied "treatment" of the control group may influence the results of a study. Results of a 15 hour marathon group experience showed that while participants did increase in self-actualization, they did not increase enough to significantly differentiate them from the control group which showed a slight increase as well (Young & Jacobsen, 1970). The authors of this study suggested that since the control subjects were selected, perhaps this special attention given to them could account for their increase along with the effects of a repetitive experience of self-reflection such as is required on the POI.

An even different handling of the control group points out the issue of whether or not people can increase self-actualization through methods other than intensive group experiences. In this study (Walton, 1973) three groups were formed, two were experiential experimental groups while the third was a control group in which procedures for promoting self-actualization were taught but not experienced. Both experimental groups increased significantly on Inner-Directness, the scale believed to be most important in measuring self-actualization. The control group showed significant change on only one scale, the Nature of Man. The findings support the hypothesis that experiential growth groups do facilitate psychological growth as defined by the POI.

Related studies indicate that variation of traditional teaching methods and not necessarily just intensive groups



may in fact increase students' self-actualizing tendencies. For example, (Mullins & Perkins, 1973), in an intensive one-semester academic program, volunteer students took part in discussions, field trips, projects, and groups. Material dealt with included a full range of academic subjects. The hypothesis was confirmed that students, given an opportunity to participate in an intensive academic program which endeavors to meet their emotional as well as intellectual needs, will experience significant measurable changes in personal attitudes, values, and behavior. These changes were reflected on the POI, however, one must be reminded again of the differences in POI scores for volunteers and non-volunteers for innovative programs. Nevertheless, the idea of variations in teaching methods producing changes for large numbers of students is an appealing and attractive one. A similar study (Leib & Snyder, 1967) also emphasized the quality of contact with the students rather than the content or method of material presented. Underachievers met in groups of 14 for either discussion or lecture for a semester. In both groups material presented dealt with psychological concepts, achieving, underachieving, and methods of improving oneself. There was no difference in results for the two groups. Both showed significant increases in self-actualization on the POI and in grade-point averages. In accordance with Maslow's theory, it was felt that the special attention awarded these students by either discussion or lecture fulfilled lower needs and released them for growth toward self-actualization.

The procedures and research designs reported in the literature dealing with self-actualization are varied. A major weakness is the need for more adequate control groups. The broad effects of "growth groups" are being proclaimed widely. The present study was designed to add empirical evidence in the area of small groups by determining the resultant effects on participating group members' self-actualization, as defined by the POI.



## Method

### Subjects

Participants in this study were drawn from a pool of college students who volunteered to participate in growth groups at Western Kentucky University. These students responded after either hearing or reading a short description of the goals of the experiential-Gestalt group. The one page description was entitled "Growth Group Opportunity" (see Appendix A). Volunteers consisted of males and females ranging from freshmen to graduate students and from 18 to 28 years of age. Out of this group of volunteers, three groups of ten subjects each were created. Two of these groups made up the experimental (experiential-Gestalt) groups while one was used as a control group. The random assignment of subjects to groups provided groups which were very comparable in the distribution of sex, age, and class rank.

### Instrument

The Personal Orientation Inventory (POI; Shostrom, 1966) was used to assess the values and beliefs considered important in measuring self-actualization. The POI consists of 150 two-choice comparative value and behavior judgements. Each item is scored twice, first to derive the two basic scales of orientation, which are Inner-Directedness (127 items), and Time-Competence (23 items), and second for the derivation of ten subscales, each measuring a concept impor-

tant to self-actualization. Only the first scoring and thus the two major areas important in personal development and interpersonal interaction were used in this study. The Inner-Directedness scale is designed to measure whether an individual's mode of reaction is characteristically "self" oriented or "other" oriented. Inner (self) directed individuals are guided primarily by internalized principles and motivations while other directed persons are to a great extent influenced by their peer group or other external forces. The Time-Competence scale measures the degree to which the individual lives in the present as contrasted with the past or future. The time competent person lives primarily in the present with full awareness, contact and feeling reactivity while the time incompetent person lives primarily in the past, with guilts, regrets, and resentments, and/or in the future, with idealized goals, plans, expectations, predictions, and fears (Shostrom, 1966). For each of the 150 items, the subject must choose either A or B, selecting that statement of the pair which is most true for himself.

Research findings support psychometric qualities of the POI as a diagnostic instrument. Shostrom (1966) found that attempts to "fake good" often distorted scores away from self-actualization, suggesting that attempts to produce a good impression do not produce a profile characteristic of self-actualizing individuals. Validity of the instrument is reported by numerous studies in the POI manual



(Shostrom, 1966) as well as by Foulds (1969), Fox, Knapp & Michael (1968), and McClain (1970). Reliability reported in the manual for the scales of Time-Competence and Inner-Directedness are .71 and .78 respectively. These figures were obtained with a test-retest time period of one week. Ilardi and May (1968) report reliability over a one year period comparable to that of studies with other established inventories such as the MMPI and the EPPS.

### Design

A split-plot factorial design was used in order to examine the quantifiable differences between the experimental and control groups as well as the differences between pre- and posttest scores.

The effects of two independent variables were investigated in this study. One independent variable was operationally defined as the nine week time interval between pre- and posttesting. The other independent variable was the experiential-Gestalt group process. This process was defined as a group of ten individuals seeking personal growth and one group facilitator, meeting together for one two-hour session per week for eight weeks. The group experience emphasized the exploration and expression of here and now feelings concerning self and other group members. Three levels of the group process were implemented: (1) group I led by leader I, (2) group II led by leader II, and (3) group III being a control group which did not meet or participate in the experiential-Gestalt group process.

The dependent variables were the levels of Time-Competence and Inner-Directedness as measured by pre- and posttesting on the Personal Orientation Inventory (Shostrom, 1966). Changes in the dependent variables over the nine week period were measured by changes in scale scores.

### Procedure

All subjects, both experimental and control, responded to the pretest at the organizational meeting held one week before the first group meeting. Posttests were administered to all subjects nine weeks later following the last group meeting.

Both of the experimental groups met from three to five o'clock in the afternoon, Group I meeting on Tuesday and Group II on Wednesday. The two group facilitators were both second year graduate students in clinical psychology. Three psychology faculty members, who were interested in group processes and human potential, participated both as observers and as supervisors of the research being conducted. All group sessions were conducted in a small carpeted room with an observation mirror at one end. It was felt that the effects of the one-day difference in meeting times would be outweighed by the advantages of using the same room, which allowed both group facilitators and their supervisors to observe all groups, thereby helping to keep the groups similar and to maximize their productiveness.

In accordance with the recent "Guidelines for Psycho-



logists Conducting Growth Groups," (APA, 1973), each participant was given, during the first organizational meeting, a copy of "Guidelines for Growth Groups" (see Appendix B). Each group, following the goals and guidelines presented, emphasized the exploration and expression of here and now feelings concerning self and others. Participants were encouraged to be open and honest in the group. They were asked to experience new methods of interaction with others and to "focus in" more on what was their present style. Members were also encouraged to become increasingly aware of their internal sensations -- the physical manifestations of their own emotions. Group facilitators provided a variety of opportunities for the participants to experiment with new or rediscovered feelings and to express themselves in different ways. Structured methods of changing things one says and facing up to one's own responsibility for his life were provided. At times, the group facilitators used a variety of techniques, including sensory awareness exercises, Gestalt awareness training, psychodrama, and fantasy experiences. To assist in the implementation of these activities, group facilitators drew at various times from the methods of Shostrom (1972), Shutz (1967), and Stevens (1971).

## Results

The analysis indicated no significant effects on the measures of Time-Competence and Inner-Directedness as a result of the experiential-Gestalt group process. The analysis is summarized and presented in Table 1 and Table 2. The hypothesis that scores would increase significantly as a function of the group process was thus not supported by the findings.

Effects of the nine week time interval, however, did reveal significant increases in the Inner-Directedness scores,  $F(1,23) = 22.949, p < .01$ . These scores did not discriminate between the experimental and the control groups. Thus while there was indeed a significant mean increase in scores of Inner-Directedness for the experimental groups, there was a comparable increase for the control group as well.



TABLE 1

Analysis of Variance on POI measure of Time-Competence

Source	<u>SS</u>	<u>df</u>	<u>MS</u>	<u>F</u>
Between				
A (groups)	44.681	2	22.340	1.534
<u>Ss</u> within groups	334.800	23	14.556	
Within				
B (time)	2.327	1	2.327	0.557
A x B	3.173	2	1.586	0.380
B x <u>Ss</u> within groups	96.000	23	4.173	
Total	<u>480.981</u>	<u>51</u>		

TABLE 2

Analysis of Variance on POI measure of Inner-Directedness

Source	<u>SS</u>	<u>df</u>	<u>MS</u>	<u>F</u>
Between				
A (groups)	636.205	2	318.102	1.059
<u>Ss</u> within groups	6902.738	23	300.119	
Within				
B (time)	644.019	1	644.019	22.949**
A x B	35.044	2	17.522	0.624
B x <u>Ss</u> within groups	645.437	23	28.062	
Total	<u>8863.443</u>	<u>51</u>		

Note -- \*p &lt; .05, \*\*p &lt; .01

## Discussion

The finding that the effects of the experiential-Gestalt group process were not significant is somewhat at odds with prior research. Foulds (1971) found the group process to be significant as a result of producing somewhat smaller mean changes in experimental group scores on Inner-Directedness than those found in this study.

Inner-Directedness is the scale of the POI believed to be the most important in measuring self-actualization. The fact that in this study the control group scores also increased significantly over time without participation in the group process clearly reflects a problem found in the review of the literature; namely, the use of improper control groups in many of the popular group process studies. Stated in the review of the literature was the belief that the use of volunteers for an experimental group and the concurrent use of non-volunteers for a control group constitutes an inadequate research design. In the present study, volunteers who anticipated being in the experiential-Gestalt groups were used as both experimental and control subjects. The point is: volunteers who subsequently are not able to participate in a group may be motivated to seek out other possible methods for increasing their own self-actualization while non-volunteers may in fact be more satisfied, rigid and less likely to change significantly over



time. People actively seeking change may be able to initiate it in ways other than an intensive group experience. Results of the present investigation suggest that this is actually the case; only by comparison to similar increases in Inner-Directedness of the control group did the effects of the experiential-Gestalt group process appear non-significant. Had a less involved and less motivated group of non-volunteers, matched only for sex and pretest scores, been used as a control group, it is likely that the results would have indicated the unique growth-producing effects of the group process. Mean changes in scores of Inner-Directedness for the experimental groups were found to be comparable to or in excess of changes reported in those studies revealing significance of the group process. Thus, motivation of growth group volunteers would be a useful topic for future research.

Analysis of the POI scores is a second methodological factor in need of future consideration. The analysis is based upon an increase in scores, regardless of the level of the pretest scores, indicating the growth facilitating effects of the group process. This phenomenon is misleading as the move toward self-actualization may in fact be reflected by a decrease in one's score. For example, if a subject's score on a pretest of Inner-Directedness is 112, the interpretation from the POI manual suggests "excessive autonomy and self-supportiveness." The move toward self-actualization for this person would be indicated by a decrease in raw score

as he would become more sensitive to others around him. This "healthy" decrease in scores did occur for two experimental subjects in the present study, which tended to statistically negate the effects of the group process. In the present investigation, 11 of the 26 subjects were in fact at or above the desired level of Inner-Directedness on the pretest measures, therefore, increases in scores were not desirable. Future research may foster the development of an instrument which can better make discriminations at the more self-actualizing levels of functioning. At present, there does not appear to be an instrument which adequately measures the continuing growth experiences of individuals functioning in a "self-actualizing" manner.

The experimental group participants tended to verbally describe their experiential-Gestalt group experience as productive and worthwhile, giving support to the idea that there may be unique experiences or important growth changes which were not assessed by the instrument used in this study. Personal growth does not tend to occur rapidly. Even eight weeks is an extremely short period of time in which to expect real personality or life style changes whether reflected on an objective instrument or reported verbally. R. Harrison (1966) found that the effects of a group process may be initiated but not fully experienced by group members for some time. He found that the change in group members tended to be more significant, as reflected on an objective personality instrument, three months after the group experience



was completed than immediately following the group.

### Summary

Use of a proper control group is a critical factor in group process research methodology. The reported significance of some group experiences may be caused by group members' motivation for change independent of the group process. Further, carefully controlled research should attempt to identify changes uniquely caused by the group experience. As a result of this study it would seem desirable to construct questionnaires for subjects which would help isolate the common ways in which controls as well as experimentals meet their needs for self-growth, whether through group participation, reading, study, specific interactions with professionals or friends, meditation, etc. Instruments more suited to detecting continuing changes in self-actualizing individuals are needed.

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## Appendix A

## GROWTH GROUP OPPORTUNITY

We are looking for people who wish to learn more about themselves, more about others, and who wish to develop more meaningful ways of relating to the world around them. In providing such an opportunity, and as part of a research study on groups, we are forming "awareness" groups for the spring semester in which as a group participant you will:

- Learn how to be more open, especially with yourself
- Experience new methods of interaction with others and more awareness of what your present style is
- Discover your potential by increased awareness of new as well as forgotten thoughts and feelings, and in feeling and living more fully and honestly
- Learn to be comfortable with the "real" you rather than spending your time trying to be what you should be, what you would like to be, or what someone else expects you to be
- Discover the joy of accepting yourself and of taking responsibility for your own life

\*\*\*\*\*

There will be an organizational meeting for all interested participants on Tuesday, January 21st at 5:00 pm in Room 132 of the College of Education. It must be stressed that this will be an organizational meeting during which times and places for groups will be decided. Groups will be formed from those volunteers present at this meeting. If you have questions, come to this meeting or contact Dan Brown at 843-6214 or Dan Miller at 842-2769.

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## Appendix B

### GUIDELINES FOR GROWTH GROUPS

Research Study  
Western Kentucky University  
Spring 1975

The general purpose of these groups is to provide opportunities for people to learn about themselves and thereby be able to relate more fully and effectively to the world around them. In addition, data will be collected from group members as part of a research project. All groups will be given pre- and posttesting on two psychological instruments. In return for contributing to research in this way, there will be no fee assessed to participants.

The groups will be experiential-Gestalt in orientation and will focus on individuals' moment-to-moment experiencing. A variety of techniques including sensory awareness exercises, nonverbal exercises, Gestalt awareness training, psychodrama, and fantasy experiences will be used as opportunities for participants to experience and express themselves in different ways.

The group leaders consist of two second year graduate students in clinical psychology. Three psychology faculty members are also involved in a supervisory capacity. All leaders and supervisors are currently at Western Kentucky University and have an expressed interest in group process and the human potential.

These groups are not intended to be "therapy" groups in the sense of alleviating stressful psychological problems. Rather, the group leader's responsibility is to provide opportunities for participants to increase awareness of themselves and others. Personal strengths rather than weaknesses, and potentialities rather than deficiencies will be emphasized. Group members are expected to attend and participate in each scheduled group session. This must be considered a unique experience and commitment for each of you and is not directly related to your academic program here at Western.

The content of any group session will be confidential within that group. Group leaders will, however, be working together closely in order to make the groups similar and to maximize the productiveness of each group. Therefore, group leaders and supervisors may at times observe groups other than their own, being concerned primarily with the processes rather than the content of those groups.

Dan Brown and Dan Miller, Research Leaders